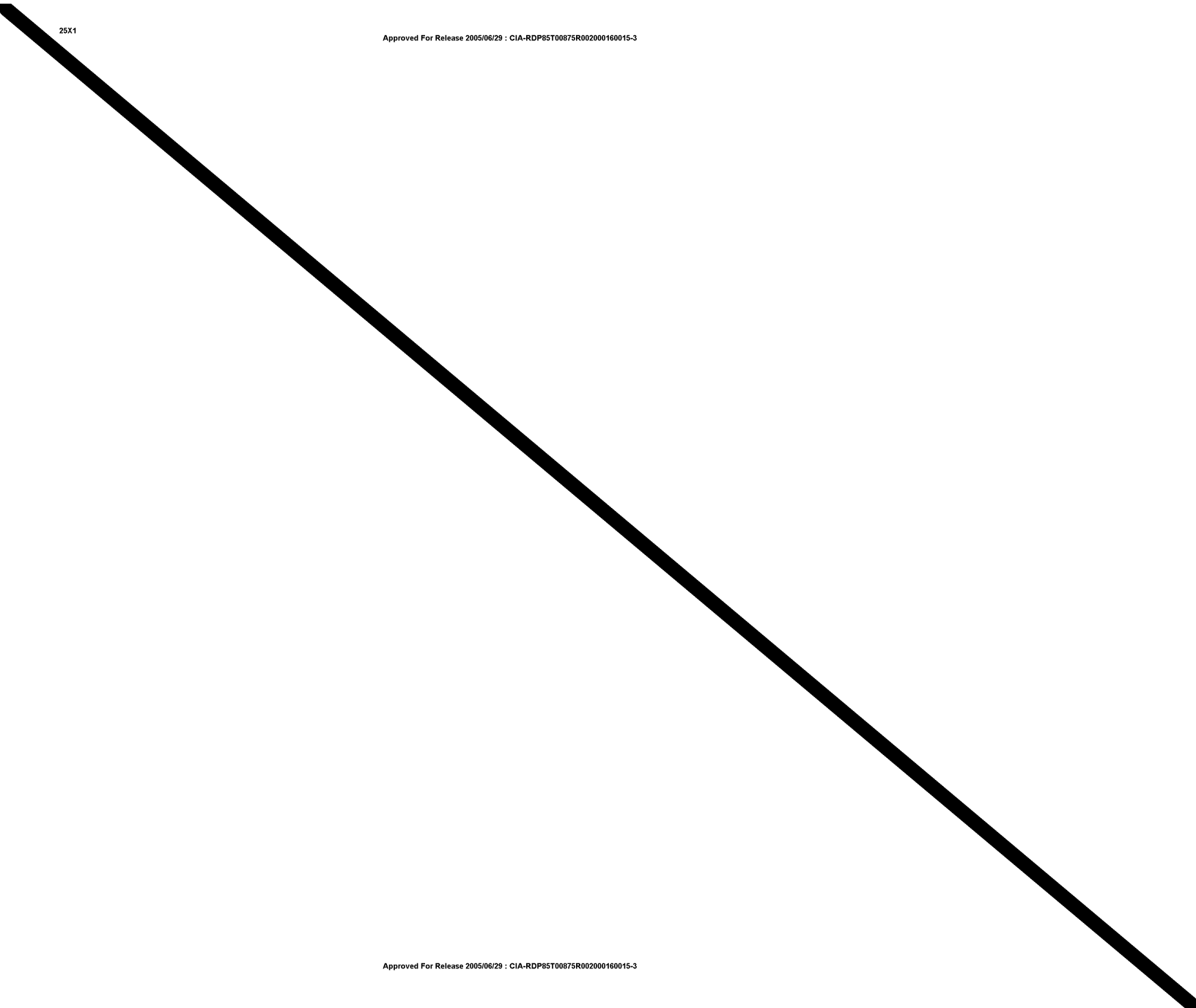

Secret

BOARD OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

The Restless Intellectuals in the USSR

Secret
24 July 1968
No. 16-68

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 16-68

SUBJECT: The Restless Intellectuals in the USSR*

Not least among the concerns the Soviet leaders have over political liberalization in Czechoslovakia is the danger of playback into the USSR itself. The gulf between the regime and the creative intellectuals, supported by a growing number of people in the educated class, has already been widening in recent years. Acts of defiance unprecedented in Soviet history have become more frequent.

Those involved are probably too few and too powerless to effect significant change in Soviet political life for some time to come. The authoritarian tradition established in Russia long before the Revolution will continue to be a heavy obstacle. But the issues of freedom and justice which writers and even scientists are raising are likely to complicate politics on the highest level, even if, as seems likely, few concessions are made. The way the regime handles its dissidents will also affect its relations with Eastern Europe and the Communist movement, and even its broader foreign relations.

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* This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated with the Office of Current Intelligence.

GROUP I
Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification

> During the last several years, sinister symptoms of the restoration of Stalinism have begun to appear in our public life....The naive hopes for complete normalization of our public life which were inspired by the decisions of the 20th and 22nd congresses did not materialize. Slowly but steadily, the process of the restoration of Stalinism is progressing. In this matter they [the regime] count mainly on our social inertia, our short memory and on the miserable fact that we are not accustomed to having freedom.... Every time you remain silent you help build another step for another trial of a Daniel or a Ginzburg. Gradually because of your silent assent we might see the dawn of a new 1937.
>
> -- from a recent Soviet protest document

1. Over the past several years there has been a marked change in the Soviet regime's attitude toward, and handling of, non-conformity among the intelligentsia.* The atmosphere for independent spirits in the Soviet Union has, of course, never been good; but since the end of 1965 it has deteriorated to the point where the intellectuals themselves believe that only under Stalin have things been worse. Although the leadership has not yet resorted to some of the more extreme methods it has at its disposal -- and there has been some suggestion that maybe it should -- it has made clear through a series of actions and

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* Intelligentsia is a Russian term that came into general use in the 19th century. It refers to a specific group of intellectuals and those of advanced education, but has traditionally also conveyed a sense of estrangement of this group from either the authoritarian practices of the state or other extremist phenomena.

pronouncements that the limits of its collective patience are quite narrowly defined.

2. The main target of the regime's critical pronouncements as well as its repressive actions has thus far been the officially unrecognized underground writers, their publications, and the circle of "legitimate" liberal intellectuals who support them. Liberal activists now comprise only a very small proportion of the politically conscious Soviet intellectual community, but they apparently represent most professions and can be found not only in large metropolitan areas but in small towns and provincial settlements far removed from Moscow and Leningrad. They appear to be of all ages, although some of the more extreme manifestations of dissent have come from the young, from the "fourth generation" (as distinct from the generations in the USSR that made the revolution, launched the five-year plans, and fought the war). If the Soviet protest phenomenon can be called a movement, it is a movement without a program. In this respect, it could be likened, perhaps, to groupings in the West whose only doctrine is political alienation. To the extent that the intellectuals use literary forms to express their opposition, however, they seem as much a part of the Russian past as of the Soviet present. Many of the

disaffected intellectuals despair of ever effecting change through established channels, and apparently a very few -- like their counterparts elsewhere -- advocate the use of violence in the pursuit of their objectives.

3. While certain features of the current protest movement are new, the dissenting views it represents did not spring up overnight; they have not been implanted from abroad as Soviet propaganda alleges; and they will probably prove resistant to all but the strongest pressures of the government. Much of the opposition in the Soviet Union today has developed as a result of a number of complex changes in Soviet society over the past several decades: rapid urbanization, the increased pace of technological advance, the emergence of a largely new class of managers and technicians, the spread of education, improvements in communications, and the increased availability of foreign travel and contacts with the West. And cutting through all these factors has been the conviction of the intellectuals that the regime's authoritarian methods are somehow inconsistent with the changes society itself has undergone.

4. If such opposition, however, can be traced to any point of origin, that would probably be the leadership's actions at

the 20th Party Congress in 1956. (Many of the defiant intellectuals hold that approval or disapproval of this Congress constitutes the real dividing line between progressive and retrogressive elements.) When Khrushchev destroyed the myth of Stalin's infallibility, he also quite inadvertently opened the door to dissent and to skepticism over the legitimacy of the system itself. Only recently, for instance, the Moldavian party leader conceded that the party's current problems with disaffected youth could be traced directly to the 1956 decision and in so doing tacitly justified the regime's ongoing effort to refurbish the image of Stalin. To the party stalwarts, the corrosive cynicism that has developed within the society since 1956 represents a continuing threat to the party's institutional authority and bureaucratic control. For a large segment of the party, then, a move away from the permissiveness of the Khrushchev period has seemed long overdue.

Reaction Begins

5. Although storm signals had been gathering almost from the moment of Khrushchev's removal, it wasn't until a year later that the regime mustered the will to move decisively. In September 1965, the liberal editor of Pravda was fired after

writing a rather eloquent plea for regime permissiveness toward the arts. The same month, it was announced that the "renegades" Sinyavsky and Daniel had been arrested for writing pseudonymous "anti-Soviet" tracts that had been published abroad. The dismissal of the editor suggested that whatever impediments to a policy change that may have existed in the highest councils of the regime had finally been overcome, and the apprehension of two writers provided the regime with the necessary props for staging a crackdown.

6. The trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel early the following year became both a turning point in the methods of the regime and the tactics of the intellectuals. The heavyhandedness of the KGB in the affair served as a clear warning to dissidents that the regime was prepared to use even terroristic means to suppress deviant currents. As for the intellectuals, the trial served as a rallying point for protest and a unifying element for overcoming divisiveness within that community itself. Moreover, the behavior of the defendants, their bold defiance of the accusations, also served as a standard of conduct which future victims of regime repression would attempt to emulate. The failure of the regime to obtain confessions prompted the wry comment by one group of

protesters that "the trial could have been the envy of A. Vyshinsky," but "he at least did extract some confessions, some evidence of a crime."

7. That the Sinyavsky-Daniel trial turned out to be an embarrassing charade would probably not be denied even by some of the Soviet leaders. It did not intimidate the intellectuals; it made a mockery of "socialist legality;" it provoked a critical reaction even among some of Moscow's more loyal foreign communist supporters; and, most annoying for the regime, it was directly responsible for inciting new protests. Nonetheless, the regime has been relentlessly pursuing what the trial began, a policy of graduated intimidation.

The Tactics of the Struggle

8. While some of the regime's more severe actions over the past few years (i.e. longterm sentences in forced labor camps and incarcerations in mental institutions) have undoubtedly encouraged many prospective oppositionists to stay within prescribed limits, others have continued their protests. These defiant ones have met the regime's challenge by extending their demands. They have progressed from appeals for literary freedom of expression

(Sinyavsky and Daniel), to calls for the elimination of literary censorship (Solzhenitzyn), to demands for the respect of civil liberties "guaranteed" by the constitution and the legal code (Bukovsky and Litvinov). Although the protesters readily concede in private that their appeals are unrealistic in terms of the Soviet political system as it currently exists, they believe that they may be able to shame the leadership into dropping its witch-hunt by confronting it with its own myths of free speech, press, and assembly.

9. One of the most striking aspects of the struggle between the regime and the intellectuals has been a rather considerable stirring of public sympathy for the dissidents. For instance, an impassioned petition to Suslov in behalf of the intellectuals was written by a collective farm chairman. In Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev, crowds now gather outside courtrooms, they carry placards defending the accused and calling for respect of civil liberties, they taunt the police and trumpet the heroism of its victims. All of this has occurred despite the fact that the regime customarily gives scant if any publicity to the arrests and trials. News has spread primarily by word of mouth, by foreign radio broadcasts, and by foreign journalists (though for a time

even some foreign communist papers critical of the Soviet regime's handling of the intellectuals disappeared from newsstands in Moscow).

10. In addition, an essentially new art form, the protest letter, has burgeoned, particularly this year. As many as 60 separate documents of this character are said to be currently circulating in the USSR. One petition was even sent to the international communist conference in Budapest last March. Some 20 of these are now available in the West and carry the signatures of more than 400 members of the Soviet intellectual community, including a sprinkling of Nobel and Lenin prize winners and a number of nationally prominent figures in the applied sciences and arts. There have been recent reports that the regime is penalizing the petition organizers by having them dismissed from their jobs, expelled from their professional organizations and from the party if they do not sign retraction statements.

11. Public demonstrations and the protest letter are the most readily visible aspects of intellectual unrest in the Soviet Union today and perhaps the most susceptible to eventual regime control, since the perpetrators are identifiable. But submerged opposition as reflected in what appears to be a network of underground publications and small, but organized groups has also

presented the regime with serious problems. (A group arrested in Leningrad last year was allegedly operating under the cover of a philosophical society which had contacts both elsewhere in the USSR and abroad.) So extensive is the circulation of manuscripts in handwritten, typescript, and mimeograph forms that one leading Soviet intellectual airily remarked that Soviet literature no longer has need of "Gutenburg's invention." In fact, the regime continues to have problems in keeping heavily tainted views out of the open press. Those writers who have been able to slip their unorthodox views through the censor have done so primarily by carrying allegory and analogy to new extremes. A recent issue of one leading literary journal, for example, included articles -- one on the "cultural revolution" in China, another on the protest movement in the US -- that some Soviets were said to be reading as commentaries on their own domestic situation. There is every reason to believe for instance, that Brezhnev himself is the arch villain of a new novel published in a Ukrainian literary journal.*

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* The novel, Sobor (The Cathedral), criticizes the Russification of the Ukraine by counterposing the values of an ancient and crumbling Ukrainian church (symbolic of traditional language and culture) to those of a prospering metallurgical factory (symbolic of urbanization, Soviet domination, and Brezhnev). Interestingly, its author, Oles Gonchar, was handpicked by the regime for the Lenin prize the year Solzhenitsyn was by-passed.

The Regime's Counteractions

12. The regime has responded to these rather clever and well constructed forms of protest with methods that are less sophisticated but more direct. It has increasingly made it clear that things are going to get a lot rougher for the protesting intellectuals before there will be any relaxation of current policies. It is noteworthy that the regime's indictment has moved from pure and simple "anti-Sovietism" to charges, in recent instances, of conspiracy to armed insurrection. This latter represents a particularly ominous turn since it is perhaps the first time in Soviet history that intellectuals have been arrested and convicted for possessing arms with the intent to overthrow the state. The regime has not yet backed up this with maximum penalties for the defendants, but the threat is clearly there.

13. Not only are the charges and penalties becoming more severe, but so are the pronouncements of the leadership. Since the beginning of this year, in particular, the top leaders have become increasingly more involved in the public harangue against homegrown "nationalist" and "revisionist" sentiments. Both Brezhnev and Kosygin in a show of public solidarity several months ago issued strong warnings to the dissidents; Kosygin demonstrated

that he is not as soft on the question of how to handle the deviant intellectuals as some of them would like to believe; and Brezhnev seemed to favor repression. Much of the leadership's recent concern can, of course, be related directly to events in Eastern Europe and to justified Soviet fears that some of their allies may attempt to fan the Soviet brushfires of protest by either example or word or both. (Indeed, there is evidence that some Czechoslovaks and Romanians have attempted to do just this.)

14. The orchestration of recent official statements on the problem of dissidence suggests that the Soviet leaders are undivided in their pursuit of the defiant intellectuals, but there is reason to believe that this is not the case. While the leadership has probably been united in assessing the potential danger of unchecked dissidence, we think that it has been far less so in assessing the overall dimensions of the problem and in determining the extent of the measures needed to cope with it. There have been reports ever since the crackdown began that the leadership has from time to time argued over the merits of whether to ease its attack or to move more forcefully against the dissidents. But it would appear that every new collision between the regime and the intellectuals, while intensifying divisiveness within the leadership, has at the same time strengthened the hand of those leaders favoring more repression.

15. The protesters for their part believe that the leadership has already reached or is rapidly approaching the threshold of a new 1937. There have been reports that some of the younger members of the Central Committee have become increasingly disenchanted with the regime's inability to cope with domestic unrest and with intransigent allies abroad, and are insisting on more vigorous policies. But most of the top leaders are conservative and have demonstrated an aversion to wave-making. A recent victim of a probable factional struggle within the leadership was the Komsomol chief, Sergey Pavlov, a persistent advocate of harsher measures against the non-conformist intellectuals. Although it is difficult to measure the precise tolerance level of this regime, probably it is somewhat greater at the moment than the protesters themselves imagine.

Prospects

16. The impact of the dissident intellectuals as a disruptive factor in society at large is small at the moment, and is likely to remain so for some time to come. But high-level concern is nonetheless real and apparently growing. As one protester pointed out, over 50 percent of the Soviet population is now under 30 and has been conditioned by the general irreverence of Khrushchevism

and by de-Stalinization in particular. While it does not automatically follow that the younger generation is uniformly forward looking and progressive (much of it is probably exactly the opposite), some of it is and some of it undoubtedly holds the regime's methods and goals as particularly anachronistic in view of the vast changes sweeping through even the communist world.

17. The recent spate of student protest activities in Prague, Warsaw, and Belgrade and the support these protesters have found in some instances within the working class itself has presumably added fuel to the fires of the Soviet leadership's imagination. Although we doubt that the regime is overly concerned with the prospect that Moscow University will be barricaded by student militants this year, it has demonstrated concern -- albeit indirectly -- that other, non-intellectual, segments of Soviet society might eventually be contaminated from some of the liberal fallout. The creeping fever of internationalism within the creative intelligentsia is yet another aspect of the problem the regime faces. One slogan, calling for a "single style of the epoch -- the same in New York as in Moscow, in Bonn as in Prague, in Rome as in Sofia," attests not only to the gap between the goals of the intellectuals and the regime, but to the

failure of the latter's propaganda itself. At the other extreme, there has been over the past few years a noticeable resurgence of nationalism, particularly in the Ukraine and Moldavia. National minority sentiments in the USSR have, of course, always been fairly combustible, but when they converge with general expressions of literary freedom, and when they find support among local party leaders, as apparently they have in some recent scattered instances, the regime's problem in suppressing them is made the more difficult.

16. While the mainstream of the protest phenomenon has been outside the party, the party nonetheless has not been immune to some spillover. Party members have taken part in the signing of petitions and protest letters, and some have been expelled from the party for this reason. In fact, some of the prime movers of the movement are the children and grandchildren of early revolutionary figures (i.e. Litvinov, Yakir, Yesenin-Volpin); this not only embarrasses the regime but complicates somewhat the problem of punishment. The virus of dissent has even spread to the families of Soviet officialdom (the sister and brother-in-law of the head of the USSR Academy of Sciences) and apparently even to a few of the regime's lower level cultural officials.

19. Whether or not the regime decides to hold to its present policies or move in the direction of more tolerance or more repression depends on a number of rather complex factors. As disadvantaged as the dissidents seem, however, they are, we believe, in a better position than their appeals might indicate. Not only is the leadership probably divided on the question of how to cope with the dissidents, but the repressive means the regime has at its disposal could very well prove counter-productive if applied too heavily or obviously.

20. A return to Stalinist-like measures would necessarily involve greater authority for the KGB, and this in turn would have the effect of at least partially reversing the policies adopted since Stalin's death aimed at strengthening the party's control over the secret police apparatus. Given the license, the KGB could certainly succeed in suppressing the protesters -- one KGB leader has made such a claim -- but at least some members of the collective leadership probably fear that the result would be new power struggles at the top and perhaps the reemergence of personal dictatorship. In addition, much more KGB involvement with the dissidents at this juncture might only serve further to popularize the dissenters cause.

21. A return to Stalinist tactics could also have the effect of eventually undermining policies adopted over the past 15 years designed to bring the USSR into competition with the advanced industrial states of the West. While many members of the leadership are contemptuous of the values of contemporary Soviet man, who thinks more in terms of profits and technological progress than in primitive Marxist concepts, some -- perhaps including Kosygin -- are probably reluctant to risk alienating this vital group in the prooess of stamping out a relatively small group of dissident intellectuals. And this is precisely what the regime must risk if it greatly intensifies its present campaign. For it is difficult to imagine a truly effective crackdown that would not include extensive restrictions on the exchange of all creative thought. At the moment, members of the scientific and technical community have been exempt from such restriction, even though some of them by rallying in support of their colleagues, are -- as has been suggested by the regime -- guilty by association.

22. For these reasons, the Soviet leaders will probably come to believe -- if they haven't already -- that the risks of a sharp crackdown are too great and the costs are simply too heavy. Instead, the regime is likely to make further efforts

at selective tightening of pressures and punishments already in use. These policies have already paid some slight dividends: one leading dissident has gone into hiding; another claimed he had already had enough and was leaving the struggle to the more militant; others are suffering from the debilitating effects of too much alcohol; and still others simply don't have the energy to continue the protest. Intellectual dissent, of course, will not end even should the energies of some of its leading proponents be sapped by the persistence of the regime's attack. But it is doubtful that this regime believes that it can achieve full results with half-measures. For the present, however, it will probably be satisfied if it can merely suppress the more visible forms of dissent and dampen the spirits of the more militant oppositionists.

23. This course of action would probably work for the time being. But it is conceivable that the anti-regime quality of the dissidence could over time be quietly strengthened and resurfaced in more effective forms, as indeed happened in Czechoslovakia under the Novotny regime. The Soviet leaders are obviously aware of this possibility, and a major step-up in repressive measures would occur if they thought it was in fact materializing in the USSR itself. As things now stand, however, the Soviet leaders seem

to feel that the measures they are taking are adequate and they seem to be counting -- as the passage at the beginning of this paper indicates -- on the Soviet population's "social inertia," "short memory," and the "miserable fact" that it is "not accustomed to having freedom."

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES : 25X1A

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Chairman